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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000335

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2016
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SUBJECT: EX-BAGHDAD MAYOR EYEING FUTURE ROLE IN IRAQ

REF: 04 ABU DHABI 1308

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a February 2 meeting in Abu Dhabi, former Baghdad Mayor Alaa al-Tamimi told Polchief that Iraq "desperately" needs secular personalities and technocrats)-like him -- to run the government's ministries. Al-Tamimi, in Abu Dhabi in search of employment, recounted how he was ousted as mayor after 16 months' service because Abdelaziz al-Hakim, leader of the United Iraqi Alliance ruling Shiite coalition wanted one of his own people in the job. He also said he is not willing to associate himself with any sectarian party, and is also careful about being seen as an ally of former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi or the United States. He said he cannot return to Baghdad at the present time because he fears for his life. Earlier in the day, al-Tamimi told U.S. CENTCOM media representatives in Dubai that filling ministerial jobs based on quotas was ill-advised, and complained that too much money was being spent on security at the expense of development. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Former Baghdad Mayor al-Tamimi met with Polchief at an Abu Dhabi hotel February 2. Al-Tamimi explained that he was searching for work in Abu Dhabi, and that he had also applied for a senior job at the World Bank. Prior to taking the mayoral job in Baghdad in April 2004 (reftel), he was working for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi's planning department as a civil engineer. He was the head of the design committee at the Iraqi Atomic Energy authority in Baghdad from 1987 to 1993, and assistant professor at the engineering college in Baghdad from 1993 to 1995. He was given permission to leave Iraq for Jordan in 1996 for treatment of liver tumors. He moved to Abu Dhabi in 1998 and did not return to Iraq until after the war. Al-Tamimi said that his next job will need to be sufficiently important because he wants to maintain his status in the eyes of Iraqis who regard him as someone who can make a difference in the future. He said he has no immediate plans to return to Iraq because his life would be in danger. He thanked the U.S. Air Force for flying him to safety in Amman after he was ousted from office in summer ¶2005.

¶3. (C) Al-Tamimi, a Sunni originally from Fallujah, said he does not want to be seen as a Sunni or as a member of a political party. He confided that he did not even join the Baath Party when he worked in Saddam's atomic energy apparatus. Saddam wanted him to become cabinet minister, but al-Tamimi refused because he wanted to go back to teaching and research at the university, he said. Then and now, al-Tamimi said he felt that he could make a greater contribution to Iraq by offering his technical expertise as an engineer. Other like-minded Iraqis are trying to convey the same message, he added, citing "tens of Iraqis" with

secular views. (Note: He cited the names Seyyar Jameel and Hamza Jowhari as examples. End note.) Al-Tamimi said he and others who share his views have used newspapers and satellite television to call on the current Iraqi leadership to invite technocrats to take part in the future government. He said he is consulting with friends and associates about organizing a conference for secular-minded Iraqis.

¶4. (C) The former mayor said that while he was in office trying to run Baghdad's affairs, some of the press backed by the United Iraqi Alliance's Abdelaziz al-Hakim were running stories denigrating him. "They claimed I had been with the Baath Party, which was not true, and they made other accusations," he said. When he tendered his resignation, a senior Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) official, Barham Saleh, approached Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a Shiite, asking that he intervene to save al-Tamimi's job. Al-Tamimi said Jaafari was powerless to do anything against al-Hakim. Asked for his views about Iran's influence in Iraq's internal politics, al-Tamimi replied that 95 percent of Iraq's Shiites are Arabs. They believe they should have political power since they are the largest sect in Iraq. Al-Tamimi opined that only 5 percent of Shiite Arabs are being influenced by Iran. He included al-Hakim in this smaller group.

¶5. (C) Al-Tamimi said he continues to resist offers by various Iraqi politicians to join their parties. He said he does not want people to think of him as a Sunni, or a member of a particular party, or as a friend of the United States, all labels which he believes will prevent him from accomplishing his mission of helping rebuild and stabilize Iraq. While he knows that will effectively exclude him from the political process inside Iraq for the next four years, he

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said he will use that time to build support for what he hopes is a kind of political comeback. "We need new people," he asserted.

¶6. (C) Earlier on February 2, al-Tamimi met with members of the Abu Dhabi-based Iraqi Business Council, a group he helped found several years ago, and U.S. CENTCOM's Dubai-based media engagement team. They discussed how the current security situation in Iraq was affecting investments by Iraqis and foreigners. Al-Tamimi talked about his experience as mayor of Baghdad. He asserted that as long as the Iraqis pursue quotas when filling ministerial jobs and other key positions, full-fledged development is not possible. He said that he relayed this to many USG officials he met during his tenure. He also complained about the scarcity of money allocated toward development, saying most of it is spent on security.

¶7. (U) Iraq TV station is scheduled to air an interview with al-Tamimi during the "Let's Talk" program on February 6. In that interview, he apparently tells the reporter that he made a personal financial sacrifice to take the Baghdad mayoral job because he believed he could make a difference for his country.

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